

THE LOVE OF OUR ESPOUSALS

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A SERMON

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*“Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying,
Thus saith the LORD: I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth,
the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.”
Jeremiah 2:2*

BRETHREN, we may forget the past, but God does not. He says, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth.” God’s mercies come to us in such a constant stream—they are so many and so varied that we are very apt to have a feeble memory towards them. But the Lord remembers what He has done for us and He expects a return.

He remembers the kindness which He showed to us in our youth—for so some interpreters read this passage—and He remembers the love which He manifested towards us in the days of our espousals. As the husbandman remembers how he ploughed the land—how he digged about the tree and dunged it, and therefore looks for a better harvest, or a larger crop of fruit, so does God remember what He did for us in our youth—how some of us were trained in godly households—sent to schools where the main part of our education was the fear of God—tenderly kept out of the way of temptation—fostered and nurtured in every good word and work. God remembers this.

If some now present are making no worthy return—but when the Lord looks upon them for fruit, He sees that they are bringing forth but wild grapes, though they may forget their indebtedness and their responsibility, let them remember that God remembers all of it and expects some response from them. Think, too, that there shall come a day when the divine memory will touch our sleeping memory into activity—God will say to us, as Abraham said to Dives, “Son, remember”—and that remembrance may be the worm that never dies within the conscience and fuel for the fire that never shall be quenched.

If men and women would but remember now what God did for them in years gone by, and remember what manner of people they ought to be in consequence of the mercy which has been lavished upon them, it would save them many regrets. It might, indeed, save them endless remorse.

I do not, however, think that that is exactly the meaning of the passage in the Hebrew. Our translators have, I believe, hit upon its real meaning, which is that God remembers what we have done towards Him. He remembers our kindness and love to Him in the days of our espousals. He here alluded to the early history of the nation of Israel, when, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, they came out of Egypt, passed through the Red Sea, and traversed the great and howling wilderness wherein were pits and all manner of dangers. Led by the fiery cloudy pillar, they faithfully traversed the roads which God marked out for them, until they came to be settled in the land which He had given them by a covenant of salt.

Those first days of the Israelite nation were heroic times. Most nations have a grandeur about their early history. Indeed, it is often so grand that our modern doubters consign the whole of it to the region of myth and suppose that it is a mass of exaggeration. The early history of Switzerland and its William Tell, for instance, has been disputed, though I no more doubt the existence of William Tell than I do my own. Even the early history of England has come under many clouds and questionings—and all because there was something heroic about it.

The early history of every Christian denomination is also exceedingly bright. If you take up, for instance, one of modern times, the Methodists, there is no page of Methodist history that can compare with the first, when they suffered and yet as boldly proclaimed the Gospel everywhere with a self-denying zeal worthy of apostolic times.

I think I might say that it is generally so with almost every church. “Ye did run well: who did hinder you?” Under the leadership of some one man whom the Lord clothes with power, as He did the Judges, one after the other, in the history of Israel, great things are done and marvels are wrought. But soon there comes lukewarmness—a gradual slipping back into the ordinary and the commonplace—alas, I might almost say into declension and backsliding.

Now, as it has been with nations, that they have a great and heroic history at first, and as it has generally been with churches, that the primitive glory is the brightest, so is it often with individual Christians. “They begin—oh, with what zeal!—with what energy!—with what prayerfulness!—with what consecration! If they do not begin so, the more is the pity, for they do not often improve upon their beginnings. But many begin so, and after a while, the runner runs into a walk, and the walker sits down at last in the Arbor of Ease, and no longer runs with diligence the race that is set before him.

The point I want to call your attention to is this—that the Lord sees His people when they are in that good state, notes it down and remembers it, makes a record of it and says, “I remember you as you were years ago. I remember you, young man, when you were young. I remember you, woman, when you were yet a girl. I remember you—the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals—when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.”

God recollects those zealous times, those happy seasons, those enthusiastic hours. And if we have come to an ebb, if we are now cold and almost dead, and have forgotten the better days—God has not forgotten them. He keeps a record of them for divers uses, some of which uses we will try to think of now as God may help us.

I. Our first head, then, is THE LORD’S COMMENDATION OF THE YOUTH OF HIS PEOPLE.

He commends Israel for what she used to be and He commends each believer for what he used to be if he used to be as Israel once was.

God is never slow to commend His children when He can commend them. It is marvelous how the Lord seems sometimes to shut His eyes to the faults of His children when He would give them praise. You recollect Sarah, when she laughed and said, “Shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” It was an unbelieving, wicked laugh, and yet the Holy Spirit commends Sarah, and says of her that she called her husband “lord.” He puts down that which was the only good point about it and seems almost to wink at her mocking doubt because she called her husband “lord.”

Sometimes the Lord puts His eye on what is good in His children and speaks of that only. As to what is wrong in them, there are other times when He will bring those wrongs to remembrance and chasten them in order to put their sin away. But when He is commending, He will fix His eye on the pearl and not touch the oyster shell—He will see the star and say nothing about the black sky in which it shines.

Well, beloved, when the Israelites came out of Egypt they were a long, long way from being what they ought to be. It was difficult to make them believe in Moses. They were ready enough to quarrel with him when the tale of the bricks was increased, and even after all the miracles, no sooner did they get out of Egypt than they began to be afraid as they heard Pharaoh’s rattling chariots in the rear.

Then they were not far in the wilderness before they began to murmur, because they had no water—and in a short time they murmured again because they wanted flesh to eat instead of the manna which God had given them. But now, the Lord seeing them altogether wandering away, looks back even upon that imperfect condition with something of satisfaction, and wishes that, notwithstanding the faults of that early period, they were still as they were then.

“I remember,” says He, “the kindness of thy youth.” But has He forgotten their unkindness? Yes—that was His own promise. “Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.” He has forgotten them. Does He not remember when, instead of coming after Him in the wilderness, they said, “Up, make us

gods which shall go before us”? Yes, but He does not mention that, for He says, “I will cast all their sins behind my back.” He remembers now only the excellence of their former state, and so, beloved, He will remember whatever excellence there was in our first estate when we first came to Christ—in spite of all its failure and imperfection.

Now what can there be in our early life for God to remember?

Well, I trust there is to be remembered at this present moment *the love of our espousals*. Let me call it to your mind. Do you recollect your first love? Oh, how clear it was—how warm! How undivided! How wholly given up to Christ! Did you love the Savior? You had been much forgiven and oh, you did love Him. You could not be enough with Him, or think too much of Him, or even say too much about Him. Did you love Him? Why, if any scoffed at you for His sake, you were pleased beyond measure. You would have been willing to go to prison for Him, ay, to have died for Him.

Did you love Him in your first days? Why, you know how you shared of your substance with great delight for His cause. You sometimes wished you had a thousand times as much and then you would have thought it a mere trifle to lay it all at His feet. There was a great breaking of alabaster boxes in those early days and often was the house filled with the perfume of the ointment.

You even grew angry if you heard anybody speak a word against Him and His cause. Sometimes you had a zeal that went far beyond your knowledge and you did some things in the earnestness of your soul which were not altogether wise. But you did love Him. Oh, how you loved Him! The zeal of His house did eat you up—every passion and power that you possessed seemed to be altogether consecrated to Him.

Did you love Him? Why, you loved the meanest of His people—there was not a lamb in all the flock you would have disdained to feed. You loved His Book—the smallest promise charmed you. You loved His house—you used to wish that all the week were Sundays and that every Sunday lasted a month. You wished to be in the land—

*“Where congregations ne’er break up
And Sabbaths have no end,”*

because you could not take your fill of His sweet love. You wanted more and still more. That was the love of thine espousals.

God remembers it and looks back upon it and commends it. And I want you, with whom it may have been five-and-twenty years ago, as well as you with whom it is only lately, to look back upon it and remember it too. I hope there are some who are in the middle of this spiritual honeymoon even now. May it last forever with you. May you never grow cold. May you never wander from your Lord. But where it is a thing of the past, remember it and think of it now with pleasure. Perhaps I might add that some of you should also think of it with regret and shame.

The Lord commends His people because, in addition to that love, there seems to have been much exultation and delight, and many acts corresponding to the love. He remembers *the kindness of our youth*. “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy espousals.” I think it means not only that these people of old loved Him, but that they showed that love.

Just see them when they have passed through the Red Sea, and for the first time, set their foot upon the desert sand of the other side. Miriam takes her timbrel and all the daughters of Israel go forth in the dances. And they sing, with shouting, “Sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider hath he cast into the sea.” “He is my God and I will prepare him a habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him.”

Those were high days. How they exulted in that dear and glorious name! Why, there was not, throughout all their camp, a dog that dared move his tongue against JEHOVAH that day. Even those who worshipped the star of their god Remphan remained silent. Even the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt who knew not the Lord kept very quiet.

The whole host seemed to be exulting in the Lord. There was not merely love, but it was love that overflowed. Their cup ran over. It was love that set the joy-bells ringing and brought out the timbrel and the harp again and again and again, that they might praise the Lord who had destroyed their enemies.

Do you remember the experience in your own life that answered to this? I do, well. I go back in thought to the time when I felt as light as a feather—when my very soul felt like the dancing snowflakes that fell around me on that morning when first I was washed in the blood of the Lamb. Oh, the exultation I had in His salvation!

Then did I wish that rocks and hills would break their everlasting silence to extol Him. No music then was like His charming name, nor half so sweet to me, nor is there now, blessed be His grace! There are some, alas, who have gone back from that point who must, nevertheless, recollect those times of ecstatic joy when first they knew the Lord.

The Lord remembers it too. “I remember it,” says He, “I remember it.” As the husband remembers the first love of his wife and perhaps, tells her of it to bring back the sweet, young, fresh feeling again, so does the Lord remind any of you who have become cold about those blessed days, in the hope of arousing you to similar kindness towards Him now.

Then, observe, He goes on to speak about how closely His people followed Him. He remembers *the reality of our fellowship*. “When thou wentest after me.” In those days, we said, and not only said it, but actually carried it out into action,—

*“In all my Lord’s appointed ways
My journey I’ll pursue.”*

“Where He goes, I go,” we said. “Where He bids me go, I go. Only let me be able by grace to follow the example of Jesus Christ and it shall be my delight to put my foot down where He puts His, and to tread in His footsteps with sedulous and anxious care.”

Do you remember when you used to feel afraid to put one foot before another lest you should go aside, and whenever you did anything you always sought His guidance? How you often took the words out of your mouth and looked at them before you spoke them, lest you should say anything but what He allowed. Oh, that was a blessed time!

I wish that carefulness, that watching of your soul, that intense desire to be right before the Lord even in little things, and in nothing to offend the jealous heart of the lover of your soul, would always continue. We are never healthier than when we have a conscience quick as the apple of an eye, when our whole nature is delicately sensitive even to the thought of sin.

Just as the sensitive plant begins to curl up its leaves the moment it is touched, as at those times our soul is wary, and coy, and tender at the faintest approach of sin. It was so at first and God commends us for it, for He says that we followed Him closely. He does commend us for it still, where He finds such grace abiding.

He commends the people, in fact, because they came out in order to follow Him. He remembers *the steadfastness of our purpose*. “When thou wentest after me in the wilderness,” He says, which signifies that the ancient people came out from Egypt in order to follow God. Was it not a grand thing when every Israelite—for there was not one left behind—left his house and his home for God?

It may not have been a very comfortable home, perhaps, for they had been dwelling among the pots and among the brick kilns, but everyone left his home. You would have thought that somebody would have said, “Poor as it is, it is where my children were born and I do not want to leave it.” But they all went out.

Some of them turned all their little property into jewels so as to make it portable—and came away with the little dough that they had made up in what our version calls their kneading troughs. “Not a hoof was left behind,” it is said. That is to say, no man left so much as a lamb, or a sheep, or an ox, but they

came out, all of them, with all that they had. It was a wonderful thing that God's power over them led them to make such a famous and perfect exodus.

But it was also so with us in our first days. We came right out from the world. Perhaps we were rather noted in worldly circles—we had gone deep into its pleasures. There were a great many who thought us jolly good fellows and reckoned that we should never turn Methodist—*never*. But we snapped every tie, cut every connection, broke every link, and out we came.

You recollect what it cost some of you in those days? Perhaps you were in a workshop and you had to run the gauntlet of the sneers of all the men. Everybody knew about it, but you did not care a button whether all the devils in hell knew about it. You defied them all. You gloried in the change.

Perhaps you were a man walking in another rank of society. You thought it rather hard at first, but by and by, you said, "If this is to be vile, I will be viler still," and you came right out. Perhaps you lost friends by your conversion, or lost prestige—got on the wrong side of the door of society, as they call it, and found yourself dead to it—no longer one of its world.

But that did not fret you a bit, you would have given up fifty thousands of such poor wretched worlds as this world to have Christ. You felt sorry you could not surrender so much as the martyrs did when they went to prison and to death—you almost wished you could do so, for it seemed such a blessed thing to come boldly out for Christ.

You did not think, then, about the leeks and the garlic and the onions. Some of your older brethren have got that flavor in their noses a little and they have begun to think about the delicacies of Egypt. But in your early days, in the time of the love of thine espousals, what cared you for leeks and garlic and onions?

You were looking after that heavenly manna, you were drawing from the eternal fountain—the water that flowed from the rock which God had smitten for you, you were satisfied then with the unseen things that faith grasped—and you were glad in the prospect of the good land towards which you had steadfastly set your face. Alas, if it is not so now!

But still the Lord remembers *the reality of our early faith*. The Israelites came out with great truthfulness and self-denial. Whatever they had, whether little or much, they had to leave it all—for what? Well, for an inheritance, but then the inheritance was all in the clouds. What did they get? As far as they could see, they were only to go into a wilderness, into a land that was not sown.

Carnal reason would have met them and said, "Now, you are *never* going to do it! What, going into the wilderness of Zin? It is full of fiery serpents. It is said to be a land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death, a land that no man ever passed through, and where no man dwells. Are you going after God there? Why, the experience of God's people is full of troubles and trials and conflicts. You do not mean to say you are going after God there?"

Old Atheist, too, perhaps came and met you when you started, and said that there was no heaven, that there was no brave country such as you had read of. And those twin brothers, Timorous and Mistrust, said that there were lions and giants on the way, and that you had better go back. Then came another, and he said that it was a rough road, and there were dragons to be encountered, and Apollyon, the arch-enemy, to be fought.

Nobody knew what of evil there was not—everything that was dreadful was there. "If you want to save your skin, you had better go back. Do not go forward," they said. "Why, you ought to hear some of those who have been pilgrims talk—they tell dreadful tales. There are some of them with very long faces and they know, you know. And if they have to confess such things, well, you had better mind what you are at."

But the children of Israel, every one of them, followed the Lord into the wilderness wherein there was no water and plunged right into a land of which they knew nothing. They went out boldly because of their faith in JEHOVAH that led the way.

Was not that what we did, too, in the days of our espousals? Yes, blessed be God. We counted the cost and then we said that we would follow our Lord whatever it might mean. We would watch with

Him one hour, or all hours, and would drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism, or do anything and everything if but He would let us be numbered with His disciples and partake of His glory at the last.

Yes, we said it deliberately, some of us. We looked over all our prospects and it did seem like ruin if we followed Him. We saw that many of our comforts must go, and they have gone. We knew that there would be conflicts, and we find that there have been. We knew all that, but we loved Christ so much that we were something of the mind of holy Mr. Rutherford who says, in one of his loving letters to his Lord, “If there were seven hells to go through to get to Thee, my Lord, give me but the word and I will wade through them.”

That was just how you felt in those days, was it not? It is how some of us feel now. There are those who do not feel quite so earnest as they did, but the Lord remembers the love of their espousals when they went after Him into the wilderness.

And then He remembers *the bloom of our early holiness*. “Israel was holiness to the LORD,” and we sought to give to the Lord the first fruits of our increase. We strove to live near to God and forsake every false way. Even some professors thought we were too nice and too precise, but we have learned since that it is not very probable that any of us shall err in that direction.

We made a conscience of our thoughts, a conscience of our words—and we were always asking this man and the other, who, we thought, knew better than we did, whether such a thing might be right or not, for fear we should be mistaken. We desired in everything to reflect the image of Christ and to be obedient to His will. Well, now, this is how it was and this is what God remembers with pleasure and would have us remember too.

God delights in the thought of the fervent love we gave Him when we knew Him first, our thoughtful and practical kindness towards His name, our steadfast resolve to follow Him at all lengths, our faith which took His least word as a warrant for action, and our holiness which shrank even from the approach of sin. Happy are we if these things still abide with us.

But if we have lost them, the Lord, like some fond mother recalling the infant days of her children, remembers them and beckons us back to our first love and our first works.

II. Now, WHY SHOULD WE ALSO REMEMBER OUR EARLY DAYS? That shall make our second point upon which, however, we will not prolong our discourse.

Let us hope that to some of us the text may be *a word of rebuke*. The Lord remembers what you were, He contrasts it with what you are and He asks you the reason for this falling off. I hope you noticed the words while I was reading the chapter. He says, “What iniquity have you found in me that you have gone far from me, and have walked after vanity and have become vain?”

Remember how He rebukes you and says, “My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water.” Now, if you have declined like this, brethren, though you have not given up religion, blessed be God—though you still dare make a profession and can do it honestly—yet if you are not as earnest, nor as holy, nor as loving, nor as prayerful as you used to be, God would chide you.

Have you good reason for this? I am sure you have not and it has a very ugly look, for other people who do not know, will say, “Ah, you see, the thing is very fine when there is a novelty about it, and it is very pretty when you do not know much about it. But these old Christians have gone farther and they have fared worse. They have got more into the heart of the thing and they have found that it was not what they thought it was.”

Oh, you are like the bad spies—you bring up an evil report of the land. Your gradual cooling down says to the outside world that Christ is not what we say He is, and so we, poor ministers, suffer very much because of you. For we may preach hardest, but they do not believe our exhortations as they believe your lies.

I tell you that one backsliding Christian does more hurt to the church of God than one minister can ever undo. And the dear children who are living near to God are often exposed to scorn through those of

you that are settled upon your lees. You are never seen at prayer meetings now. You do not care much about an extra service in the week. You are so busy now, although you are not busier than you used to be—you never speak of Jesus Christ to others now as you used once to do.

Is Christ worse than He was? Does He deserve less at your hands? Do you owe Him less? Are you not, indeed, more in debt than you ever were to His rich mercy and free grace? The more He does for you, are you going to do the less for Him? Because you are getting older, or have received more mercies, are you going to be less grateful? Is it to be true that the young people are to outshine you? The more you know and the more you grow, are you to love the less?

Oh, I beseech you by the love of Jesus Christ and by His heart of mercy, do not allow it to be so, my beloved, but pray that, by the Holy Spirit, you may be brought back to where you were—nay, that you may be carried forward to something far beyond what you used to be when first you knew the Lord. So our text should come home as a word of rebuke.

Then, this word of God should be used as *a word of warning*. Dear young Christian people, you who have just joined the church, I think I hear you say, “Oh, it is dreadful that anybody should have less love to Christ than they used to have.” It is dreadful and I mourn over it. But I stand in doubt when I hear you say, “It shall never be so with me. If I forget my Lord and love Him less than I do now, let my right hand forget its cunning. It cannot be. Why, I shall go from strength to strength, and I shall love Him more and more. I know I shall, and I shall do more as my circumstances improve, as my opportunities increase, and as my gifts are multiplied.”

That is what you say and it is what you ought to say—but unless you are very watchful, it is not what you will do. Oh, how deceived I have been in some members of this church. Not that they have gone into sin, not that they are any discredit to the Christian name as far as outward acts are concerned. But there is not that bottom of deep spiritual life, and there is not that growth of fruitfulness, and there is not that zeal for God that I really thought I should see in them, especially in those that were great sinners and in those that have had marvelous joy and deep experience.

They ought to be—ah, well I will not say, “they”—we all ought to be very different from what we are—so do not let us depend upon the strength of resolution, or on our present emotion, but let us commit ourselves unto the Lord, who alone is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Rejoice not, O young man, in your spiritual youth. Exult not, O new convert, in the strength of your love. Ask the Lord to keep these as strong as they are and to make them infinitely stronger—that you may really go from strength to strength. But if you at any time trust your own heart, you will be a fool. Ah, I would to God that we might realize what Christian experience always ought to be, namely, ascending and yet ascending, and yet ascending still—loving, and then loving so much that the first love seems to be eclipsed, and then loving more till that better love seems but second-rate. And then loving yet more till all that went before, when heaped together, seems as nothing compared to what we have reached.

Doing and daring—yielding up and resigning—exactly as God may call us, each time with greater joy and greater zest. Having life and having it yet more abundantly. I wish that Darwin’s theory might be carried out in us as Christians until, as he talks of an oyster developing into an Archbishop of Canterbury, we who at our conversion were little better than the oyster, should go on developing, developing, and developing in spiritual things until we should know what John meant, who said, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” God grant you such development as that, and preserve you from backsliding, and to His name shall be the praise.

I only hope that some of the words I have spoken, if not directly uttered to the unconverted, may glance in their hearts and lead them to seek a Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JEREMIAH 2:1-19

Verses 1-3. *Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD.*

God remembered what Israel used to be in those good days when the Lord alone did lead them and there was no strange god among them. Now He bids them remember from whence they had fallen, and repent and do their first works lest He come unto them in wrath. Oh, beloved, if you ever lived near to God—if you ever rested your head on Christ’s bosom and have now wandered away from Him, and are spiritually cold and dead, begin to chide yourself, for the Lord Himself, in the word before us, does chide you. He calls you to a sorrowful remembrance of the position from which you have descended—the heights of grace from which you have come down. Breathe the prayer that He would restore you again. “Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You.”

4-5. *Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?*

He asks them whether there was any fault in Him—any failure in keeping His promise—whether He had dealt unjustly or unmercifully with them that they had thus gone away from Him and walked after vanity.

6. *Neither said they, Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt?*

Ought they not always to have remembered the wonderful wilderness journey where God seemed to multiply His miracles in the midst of their great necessities? Some of you have passed through a wilderness too, yet you have been richly supplied. You have had to admire the constancy of the divine goodness. God has not failed you ever, even in your worst circumstances.

Do not let it be said of you that you never say, “Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt.” On the contrary, always fly to Him when you are in time of trouble. Remember that this is the way to glorify God. “He shall call upon me and I will answer him” is one of God’s own promises. And then He adds—“and he shall glorify me.”

7-8. *And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.*

Was not this very shameful that in Canaan, which God had chosen beyond all countries for its fertility that He might give it to His own people forever, there they began to set up idols and altars to other gods? And the priests, whose lips ought to have kept knowledge, and the prophets who, above all men were bound to have spoken in the name of the Lord, joined the people in their sin. They even urged them to worship Baal—that dummy deity, unworthy of a moment’s respect who should not have been so much as thought of by God’s people. They ought not even to have taken the name of Baal into their lips.

Do you not see yourselves here, O backsliders? If you ever knew the Lord and have gone back to the world, if you have submitted yourselves again to the powers thereof and sinned with a high hand, have you not acted most shamefully towards your God? And ought you not, with a blushing countenance and weeping eyes to return to Him and ask mercy at His hands?

9-11. *Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.*

How powerfully this is put! No other nation gave up its gods. Though they were not gods, but mere images of clay or gold, they would not change them. They stuck to their idolatries with wonderful pertinacity—but God's people gave up the true God to worship the demons of the nations round about.

And is it not an unhappy thing that there are now some who at least call themselves God's people who go back to the world and seem to be more in love with it than ever they were? It is a horrible thing that is done.

I have heard of a chieftain of an Indian tribe whose nephew was converted to the faith, but who, after a short time, fell into sin and renounced his profession—the old chief used to always answer all the teaching of the missionary with this argument—“My nephew tried it and gave it up. He ought to know.” Well, when this was told to the young man, it broke his heart and happily brought him back to the God he had forsaken.

Perhaps there are some in the world who are gathering excuses for continuing in sin from the unhappy conduct of such as backslide. “Look at him,” say they, “how hot and zealous he was—and see what he is now.” Can you bear the thought, backslider? If there remains a spark of love to Christ in your soul, you will feel bitterly the sorrow that others should make an excuse for blasphemy and for rebellion against Christ out of your evil conduct. Oh, pray tonight—“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

12-13. *Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

If a man should change for the better, his selfishness might be a little excuse for leaving his old love. But when he changes for the worse—leaves a fountain for a cistern—a flowing fountain for a broken cistern that holds nothing—why, there is madness in his sin. “Be astonished, O ye heavens and be horribly afraid.”

14-17. *Is Israel a servant? is he a homeborn slave? why is he spoiled? The young lions roared upon him, and yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant. Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of thy head. Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way?*

The people of Israel had got into a dreadful state of poverty and famine and oppression. Their enemies had so destroyed the land that it was full of lions that even yelled in the very streets where once men and women and children abounded. And God says to them, “Is not this the result of your own sin? Was it so when you lived near to Me? Have you not brought this upon yourself by your sin?”

So, child of God, if you are unhappy tonight—if you are mourning—if you cannot find comfort in the world—no comfort in God either, “hast thou not procured this unto thyself? When you did live near to God, when prayer was continual, when you did watch your conduct, when you did go softly asking God to guide you from day to day, was it not better with you then than now? Then your peace was like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. If it is not so now, hast thou not procured this unto thyself in that you have forsaken the Lord your God when He led you by the way?

18. *And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?*

For instead of going to the fountain of living waters, they were hoping to be helped by the Egyptians or helped by the Assyrians. Just as there are some Christians who try to drink the muddy waters of sinful pleasure and of carnal lust, they are beginning to think the muddy river very sweet and to like the taste of it.

It is a deadly evil when professing Christians begin to do as others do, and to mix with the world and feel pleasure in it. There will be a blight upon you if you turn from God! Misery will dog your steps before long if you be indeed a child of God.

19. *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.*

A very solemn passage. May we lay it to heart. Not only is there guilt in our sin for which we shall have to answer at God's judgment seat, but there is evil in it which will come swiftly upon our own heads even here, "Be sure thy sin will find thee out." The thing you think will be your strength will be your scourge. What you dream of as pleasure will prove to be your plague.

If you have ever known the joy of God's service, all this shall be doubly true of you—you shall never again be able to find satisfaction in the world, and God, the God whom you did once delight in—will let your own wickedness correct you and your backslidings reprove you, because He wishes you to come back to His side and to drink again of the living waters which you have so foolishly forsaken.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.